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The menacing computer

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Book Review

The Menacing Computer

Nowadays it has become a cliché to speak of computer risks and to mourn the vulnerability of a society depending to such a large extent on electronic data processing. Quite unrealistic estimates are frequently made, attempting to evaluate the number and importance of casualties resulting from frauds or due to natural phenomena.

It is however less common to find an author who patiently makes a full inventory of such risks, 'with method, time and friends' indexes them, analyzes them and, at the same time, sticks to facts without allowing his imagination to run away with him.

Jean-Pierre Chamoux, in *Menaces sur l'Ordinateur*, begins by challenging the idea that most applications of computer technology are to be found in highly sophisticated fields such as industrial automation, robotics, computer-assisted teaching and databanks. On the contrary, he claims the classical uses of computers remain rather trite applications in the field of accountancy and general management. It is also in these areas that the major risks lie, which, quite obviously, become more and more frequent as the number of computers in operation increases.

The author considers that an information system constitutes a technological chain and that its weakest link will break first. He states that the most vulnerable element is not the computer itself but the environment in which it operates.

The computer will be negatively affected by external events such as power breakdowns, variations in electrical current, air-conditioning failures, magnetic fields created by a monitoring radar or by a broadcasting station, natural electrostatic phenomena, lightning, fire, flood, earthquake, smoke, soot or corrosive vapors. For each type of casualty Chamoux tells us a true story and demonstrates not only that its occurrence is more frequent than usually believed but, even more important, that the damages are incredibly high.

In the second part of the book he deals with the various facets of computer crime, such as stealing computer time, piracy and illicit duplication of tapes. He also tackles the large field of financial fraud, going from theft or fraudulent reproduction of a credit card to real electronic holdups made with the aid of a computer.

Numerous examples are given that emphasize vulnerabilities as diverse as electronic funds transfers, insurance premiums, unemployment allowances; in short, all highly computerized systems with a memory located in magnetic tapes.

The author concludes with a chapter dealing no longer with threats *over* the computer but with threats made *by* the computer. This section expands on the risks to which private individuals are in-

creasingly exposed, as a result of the development of highly automated administrations which endanger law-abiding citizens not only in their day-to-day life but, more important, also in searches for criminals or in court proceedings.

This book will no doubt be of interest to the specialist and to anyone who wishes to be more acquainted with the genuine civilization issue that the computer constitutes for our society. ■

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Menaces sur l'Ordinateur, Jean-Pierre Chamoux, Editions du Seuil, 27 rue Jacob, Paris VIe, France. ISBN 2 02 009322 7, 1987, FF85.

Source Data

The International Handbook on Computer Crime by Ulrich Sieber

The operation and security of computer systems have become of crucial importance both for businesses and public administration. Computers are now used extensively and many services rely heavily on them. It is not surprising therefore that the level of criminal offenses involving dp systems has steadily grown over the past decade and developed into an international problem. The book provides a comparative survey of the relatively recent phenomenon, covering many important aspects: analyzing computer crime, legal issues, preventative measures and prosecution of computer criminals.

John Wiley & Sons Ltd., Baffins Lane, Chichester, Sussex PO19 1UD, UK. Tel: (44-243) 784-531; telex: 86290. ISBN 0471 91224 7, 1986, 288 pp, US\$42.95/£24.95. ■

Computing Information Directory (CID)

compiled and edited by Darlene Myers Hilderbrandt

A completely revised and updated version of the 1986 edition is now available. It has extensive subject indexes and contains information on more than 1,700 computer-related journals, numerous indexing and abstracting services, directories, review resources, dictionaries and handbooks, software resources and over 700 programming languages. In this 1987 edition Chapter III has been expanded to include bibliographics and special issues and Appendix D to include numbers that are important to the cataloguing and classification of computing literature. It also has an entirely new appendix on university computing collections.

Pedaro Inc., Department F, 32606 Seventh Avenue SW, Federal Way, WA 98023, USA. Tel: (1-206) 874-2555. ISBN 0 933113 02 1, 1987, 750 pp, US\$119.95 (US), US\$125.95 (Canada), US\$149.95 (elsewhere). ■